

HINTS TO OFFICERS LEAVING THE SERVICE CONCERNING THE SETTLEMENT OF THEIR ACCOUNTS WITH THE
ORDNANCE DEPARTMENT.

ORDNANCE OFFICE,
WAR DEPARTMENT,
WASHINGTON, June 14, 1864.

In order that officers of the Army who, during their term of service, have become responsible for Ordnance Stores, and who, in consequence, have accounts relating to such property to settle with this Bureau, may clearly understand the proper course to be followed to obtain a prompt adjustment of such accounts in this office, and to save them, if possible, from the expenses incurred by the employment of agents to attend to such business, the following information, of special interest to such officers, is given herewith:

Where it is possible to do so, it is always preferable for every officer to transact his own business with the Department, either personally or by letter. Great care is taken to reply promptly to all communications, and it is the intention of the Department, while it holds every officer to a strict accountability for Ordnance property, to afford him freely every facility in its power necessary to a correct and speedy adjustment of his accounts.

Officers about to leave the service frequently find themselves held accountable for stores without being able to understand how the charge originated. The following are the—

INDIRECT WAYS IN WHICH OFFICERS BECOME CHARGED WITH ORDNANCE PROPERTY.

1. If an officer makes a requisition for stores on any officer or agent of this Department, when that requisition is filled, it is sent to this office, and here the stores are charged against the *requiring officer*; therefore, officers whose duty it is to *approve* requisitions should be careful not to make themselves the *requiring officer*, as the officer who is to *receive, make use of, and account for* the supplies, is the one to sign the requisition in that capacity.

2. Another source of responsibility frequently overlooked arises when an officer commands a company without ever having receipted for the property in the hands of the men.

All officers who command a company should remember that, whether they receipt for the Company property or not, the law holds them responsible for all Ordnance Stores in the hands of or issued to the men they command. Upon this law the form of Company Histories adopted by this Department is based.

OBJECT OF THE COMPANY HISTORIES.

A printed form, called a Company or Regimental History, according as it is intended to chronicle the history of the command of a company or regiment for a given period, is sent from this office every quarter, with the blanks for making up the Ordnance returns, with a view of being filled up by the company or regimental commanders, so as to give from the muster rolls an

exact official history of the command of each company or regiment during the preceding official quarter. From this data the list of officers properly chargeable with Ordnance Stores in such organizations during each quarter is made up.

Every officer whose name appears on these histories as having had command of a company or regiment for any period, must make a return of the Ordnance Stores of his command for that period, or offer such explanation to this Department as shall show that the stores were duly accounted for during that time by some other officer. Hence, too much care cannot be exercised to have these reports agree with the statements made on the muster rolls.

Many officers, ignorant of their use, or unmindful of the importance of accuracy in dates, have, by their erroneous statements, not only misled this Department, but have greatly delayed the settlement of their own accounts and those of officers whom they have wrongly charged with commands.

Unless these Company and Regimental Histories are filled up and sent to this office with the returns, the accounts of company and regimental officers cannot be closed, nor can it be officially ascertained who is accountable. It is as important, therefore, to the Lieutenant, who has not had command of the company, as it is to the Captain, who has, that this paper is promptly transmitted, since, until this evidence of his non-accountability for stores is furnished, a final certificate of non-indebtedness for Ordnance property will not be given him by this Department.

In all cases where these histories are not rendered within ninety days after the time they are due, the pay of the officers so delinquent is recommended to be stopped until they are furnished.

OFFICERS SHOULD SEE THAT THEIR RETURNS COVER THE WHOLE PERIOD OF THEIR RESPONSIBILITY.

3. Too much care, therefore, cannot be exercised by officers who have at any time during their terms of service been accountable for Ordnance Stores, to see how they stand when they desire to leave the army. If returns have not been made, they should make them; if they have been, they should assure themselves that they have rendered all that are necessary, and have covered the *whole period* of their accountability.

The object of this caution will become more apparent when it is understood that many officers who have had command of companies for periods embracing parts of two or more quarters—say from October 16, 1862, to February 25, 1863, being part of the 4th quarter of 1862 and part of the 1st quarter of 1863—think they have done their whole duty if they make returns for a part of the 4th quarter of 1862, and leave the officer who succeeds them to make a return for the whole of the 1st quarter of 1863.

This, however, is not legal, since no officer can assume responsibility, or properly certify to returns embracing a period anterior to his taking command of the company. In a case of this kind, the officer would be held by this Department for that part of the 1st quarter of 1863 from January 1st to February 25th, and a regular return, clearly showing what final disposition was made of the property, would be required.

METHOD OF ASCERTAINING AN OFFICER'S ACCOUNTABILITY AND ADJUSTING HIS ACCOUNTS.

4. Whenever an official notification is received at this office that an officer is about to resign or to be mustered out of service, the books are examined to ascertain whether he has at any time during his term of service become responsible for Ordnance property, and, if so, whether he has made all the requisite returns. If he has made the whole or a portion of them, such as still remain in the office are at once examined and referred to the Second Auditor of the Treasury for final settlement.

If he has not made any or all the returns required, and he is about to resign, or has resigned, suitable blanks, with the necessary instructions, are sent him to enable him to comply with the regulations.

If his regiment is about to be mustered out, a debit and credit account of all the returns due and received from each officer is transmitted to the Paymaster General through the Adjutant General, with a request that no officer shall be finally paid until he has sent all the returns due from him to this office, and he can show the evidence of such receipt to the proper officer of the Pay Department.

It should be distinctly understood by every officer that this Department holds him to account for Ordnance Stores from the day they were received until they have been duly accounted for to this office. Thus, an officer who received stores in January, 1862, and transferred them to another in March, 1862, but who never made any return of the property until he left the service in June, 1864, would be held by this Department for the whole period of time from January, 1862, to June, 1864, or until he should show by proper vouchers that he disposed of the property in March, 1862, and had never received any since.

Such being the steps taken to ascertain and close an officer's accounts with this Department, it will readily be seen that the officer himself is the most competent person to attend to the business, give all requisite explanations of the details of his case, and receive the papers indicating the final settlement of his accounts.

OF THE TRANSACTION OF BUSINESS THROUGH STATE OR CLAIM AGENTS, OR OTHER PARTIES.

5. But it is a common occurrence that officers, by reason of sickness or other disabling causes, are obliged to have their business attended to by other persons; and, where this is the case, it is most important that they should fully understand the rules of this Department, both to avoid vexatious delays, and to protect them from the impositions of dishonest agents, who frequently claim to have peculiar advantages for the settlement of accounts at this Bureau.

By direction of the Secretary of War, this Department is prohibited from furnishing to any person, except such as are directly interested, copies of papers, or any other data relating to the current business of the office.

It is for this Department to decide how far parties who request such information may be considered as coming within the scope of this regulation. Therefore, in all cases where the interests of an officer are represented, or information of any kind concerning his accounts with this office is wanted by a third party, the first point to be decided is, whether the individual who appears for the officer is a proper person to whom to communicate the desired information, or to whom to intrust the interests of the officer.

When the official position of the person making the inquiry is such that it is a guaranty of the motives which prompt the request—as, for instance, where information is wanted about an officer's accounts by a brother officer, a member of Congress, or civil employee of the government—all such information as is requisite will be granted.

With regard to regular agents the case is different. Two classes of them transact business for officers with this Bureau: the regularly appointed *State Agents* residing in Washington, and *Claim Agents*. The former are appointed by the Governors of their respective States to assist officers and soldiers from such States, to whom their services are gratuitously given.

So long as these persons act in this capacity and make no charge for their services, their official position will be recognized by this Department; but no State Agent will be allowed to do business for an officer from a State other than that or those he officially represents.

Claim Agents do business for officers for a compensation; they have no official position, and are only recognized as interested parties within the meaning of the instructions from the Secretary of War, when they comply with the regulations of this Department as hereinafter prescribed.

No information of any kind in relation to an officer's accounts will be given to any Claim Agent, or other party who receives compensation for his services, until such agent or party has filed in this office evidence to show that he is regularly licensed to do such business, and has paid to the Treasury Department his proper tax.

The agent, whether State or Claim, will next be required to produce a proper power of attorney from the officer for whom he acts; but this instrument will not be considered valid, and will carry with it no authority, unless it bears a revenue stamp of the amount of one dollar.

Having complied with these regulations, the agent will be put in possession of such data as would be afforded the officer were he present in person.

In all cases where a final certificate of non-indebtedness is required, the Department reserves to itself the right of refusing to give it to any one except the officer whom it affects.

BLANKS.

6. To facilitate the rendition and examination of the accounts and returns prescribed by the regulations, this Department has had prepared and keeps on hand a variety of blanks, supplies of which, suited to the wants of various arms of service, are regularly sent to every company and regimental organization in the army, as well as permanent forts, batteries or garrisons, once during the quarter.

In all cases where these blanks do not reach the officer to whom they are sent, or where, by reason of his resigning or being mustered out of service, additional supplies are required, they can always be obtained on personal application or by letter; but no blanks of any description will be furnished to Claim Agents, unless they present a regular power of attorney from the officer in whose name they prefer the request, and then only in such numbers as are needed to close the officer's accounts.

Owing to the numerous instances in which attempts have been made by Claim Agents to obtain blanks under false pretenses, no requests for them in writing, purporting to come from an officer, but presented in person by a Claim Agent, will be noticed.

The proper conduct of the business of this office having been much embarrassed in consequence of the use by Claim Agents of forms of affidavit printed in imitation of those furnished by the Department, and their presentation having in several instances resulted in giving to the officers signing them certificates of non-indebtedness, although they had unsettled accounts in the office, *hereafter no affidavits of non-indebtedness for Ordnance Stores will be received or accepted by this Department, the blank form for which has not been furnished the party through this office.*

The Department has been forced to adopt this course in consequence of the conduct of dishonest persons; and it takes this opportunity to inform all officers of the army who desire to make use of such forms, that they must in all cases apply to the Chief of Ordnance for them.

This caution should be borne in mind by officers who may at any time leave the service.

GEO. D RAMSAY,
Brig. General,
Chief of Ordnance.